



INDIA'S RELATION WITH WEST ASIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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INTRODUCTION

India has ties to West Asia since millennia. The Indus valley civilization had trade link with west Asia region. India has traditionally maintained strong relations with many west Asian countries and it has sought to deepen its engagement with the region through economic, political and cultural ties. The Gulf States supply the bulk of India's oil and natural gas, promote trade and investment, and engage security and intelligent co-operation. India's look west policy aims to deepen engagement with west Asia. This is driven by energy security needs, counter-terrorism cooperation, economic integration and strategic partnerships. India has had trade partnership west Asia in areas of the energy and oil since 1990s. The look East policy, India charted a new approach focusing on building strategic relation with west Asia.

Significances of west Asia for India:

West Asia is of significance for India due to its location as well as its role in global geopolitics. The region is so significance for India because of social, cultural, political, security and economic aspects. Some of the major point's interests for India in west Asia are:

- **Ties:** India's cultural, economic and trade ties with the countries of west Asia region are deep and abiding. Oil and trade is the major side of the West Asia region.
- **Energy security:** India imports a significant portion of its energy needs from west Asia, particularly oil & natural gas. Saudi Arabia and Iran are major suppliers of oil to India.
- **Economic significance:** West Asia is a vital trading partner for India. Indian companies have invested heavily in the region; particularly in the infrastructure, construction & technology sector.
- **Cultural ties:** India has a long history of cultural exchange with West Asian countries. India has also established cultural centre's in several countries in this region.
- **Countering radicalization:** Close cooperation with West Asian countries can serve as counter to radicalization. India always tries to solve the problems.
- **Get away to central Asia:** West Asia has the potential to serve as the get away to landlocked central Asia. Example: Chabahar port development by India in Iran.
- **Trade route:** The west Asian region served as a land trade bridge early European empires and a flourishing trade in spices, cloth, silk and indigo in exchange for gold and silver is well recorded.
- **Monetary system:** The British colonial era saw advent of a loose common monetary system with the rupee serving as legal tender in several Gulf States till the middle of 20th

century.

- **Oil exploitation:** The discovery of the commercial exploitation of oil of the gulf region during the colonial era started to alter the balance of trade flows between India and the west Asian countries.
- **Trade:** Today, the countries of the west Asian region collectively accounts for over a sixth of India's total bilateral merchandise trade and contribute about three fifth of India's crude oil supplies.
- **Employment:** the region is a major provider of job to Indian workers and professionals and entrepreneurs and houses about 89 lakh Indian.
- **Remittances:** the NRIs west Asian countries annually send home about \$40 billion and account of more than 55% of the country's total remittance inflows.
- **Investment:** investments from sovereign wealth funds and other large investors from the gulf cooperation council (GCC) have also climbed steadily in recent years.

Areas of Cooperation India & West Asia:

There are several areas of cooperation between West Asia & India some of this includes:

- **Trade & commerce:** The West Asia has traditionally been an important trading partner for India. Example: India's trade with UAE stood at 73billion in 2021-22 with a growth of 68% compared to 2020-21.
- **Strategic partnership:** India has developed strategic partnership with a number of West Asian counties to enhance its political and security interest in the region. Example: India has a CEPA with the UAE and strong defense ties with Israel.
- **Migration & labour:** There is also significance amount of migration and labour movement between India & West Asia, with many Indians going to the region for work. Example: India is one of the largest sources of migrant labour in countries such as the UAE & Saudi Arabia.
- **Humanitarian assistance:** India has provided humanitarian assistance to countries in the region during time of crisis such as during natural disaster or conflict. Example: India has provided humanitarian assistance to Syria during its civil war.
- **Connectivity:** The international north- south transport corridor. Its envision a multimode network of ship, rail & roads routes for transforming freight aimed at reducing the carriage cost between India & West Asia to Europe.
- **India-UAE ties:** UAE is the India's third largest trade partner & second largest export destination. In terms of people to people ties, the Indian expatriate community of

approximately 3.4 million is the largest of India's Diaspora.

- **India-Iraq ties:** Iraq was India's fifth largest trading partner in 2021-22 at \$ 34.3 million it is also one of the major oil suppliers to India.
- **India-Qatar ties:** Qatar is India's most important supplier of natural gas. It account for 41% of Indian total natural gas imports.
- **India-Oman ties:** India has secure access to the key port of duqm Oman for military use and logistical support. This has help India to strengthen its footprint in the Indian Ocean. India is also among Oman top trading partners.

Challenges of India & West Asia ties:

There are some major challenges in India West Asia ties are:

- **Limited economic ties:** Despite efforts to expand economic ties, trade between India and west Asian countries is relatively limited compare to other region. Example: In 2019 Indian total trade with west Asia for just 7.5% of its global trade.
- **Geopolitical tension:** West Asia is volatile and politically tense region and India has to navigate these complex geopolitical dynamic in its relation with countries in the region. Example: India has to balance it relation with Israel and Palestine.
- **Competition with other major powers:** India's relations with west Asian countries are also influenced by competing interests of other major powers like china. Example: India has sought counter china's increasing regional influence through economic and security cooperation with countries like UAE and Saudi Arabia.
- **Political instability:** many countries in west Asia have political instability, which has had negative impacts India's interest in the region. Example: the internal security situation in Syria, Iraq and Yemen is unstable. The Israel and Palestine conflict is one of the major reasons of this.
- **Source of terrorism:** the rise of the Islamic state and other terror group has created a threat to Indian Diaspora residing in west Asia. Also the radicalization of Indian youth and their joining of Islamic state has been another major problem. Hisbulla and Hamas are the main example in this region.
- **Energy security:** the majority of these energy security imports come from west Asia, and any disruption to the supply of this energy resource can have serious implication of Indian economy.
- **Sectarian tensions:** sectarian tension between Shia and Sunni Muslims in the region has effected India's relation with west Asian countries. Example: India has sought to balance its relation with Iran, predominantly Shia countries and Saudi Arabia predominantly Sunni countries.

India's foreign policy towards West Asia:

India has maintained good relations with west Asian countries through economic, political and cultural ties. Indian foreign policy has been focusing on building strategic relation with west Asia. Some of the steps taken under the policy include:

- **India- UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement CEPA):** The India and UAE signed the CEPA in 2022, which is expected to increase the bilateral

relationship between the two countries.

- **Overseas Investment:** Saudi Arabia is actively investing the Jio platform of Reliance Industries.
- **Chabahar port development:** The Chabahar is located in southeastern Iran in the gulf of Oman. It has offered India connectivity to central Asia(specially Afghanistan through Iran)
- **India-Arab Cooperation forum:** India hosted the India-Arab Cooperation Forum in 2014, promotion existing India-Arab engagements and annual ministerial exchanges.
- **Cooperation with Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC):** In 2019, India had made its maiden appearance at the OIC foreign Minister meeting as a guest of honour.

Future of west Asia and India relations:

Commerce and trade:

West Asia at present figures prominently on the commercial and trade map of India. India is economically deeply integrated with west Asia. UAE is the third trade partner of India. India and UAE have already signed a free trade agreement which is expected to \$100billion over five years the present \$60 billion.

Countering terrorism:

India can collaborate in a mutual security and military pact with the countries Israel,

Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Bahrain etc. the pact must focus on common intelligence sharing counter terrorism operation and joint armed forces exercise to promote synergy.

Climate change and sustainable development:

A regional sustainable development treaty under the aegis of the I2U2 grouping could be signed by expanding the membership of the grouping to include as many west Asian counties as possible.

Cultural exchange:

India should cultural exchange with west Asian countries as a way of building stronger ties and understanding.

Maintain a balanced approach:

India should try to good relation with all the countries in the region rather than taking sides in any geopolitical disputes.

People to people ties:

India and west Asian countries share deep civilization ties which date back several centuries. A game changer for the future of the people as far as India and west Asian countries are concerned is the possibility Abraham Accords 2.0 being signed between Israel and Saudi Arabia and Iran.

CONCLUSION

The India and west Asian countries promoting regional peace and prosperity in the region. For the future India can collaborate in mutual security and military pact with countries like Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Bahrain etc. India is economically deeply integrated with West Asia. UAE is the third largest partner of India, also other countries like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Oman etc is important from the point of view of export

of key commodities like oil, petroleum products, engineering goods etc.

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